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ON SOME IDOLS OR FACTITIOUS UNITIES.

BY J. BURNS-GIBSON.

Do such words as "Social Organism," "Humanity," and even "Universe" and "Deity," in a monotheistic or pantheistic sense, stand for realities or real unities, or are they merely concept terms, and some of them, perhaps, words for which it is impossible even to frame a corresponding concept? If they are not real unities, but conceptual, ideal, or merely verbal, then it is a sort of idolatry to take them for such, and let them command us, and impose on us a kind of worship and reverence; and that is what is meant by calling them idols.

One often hears talk about a "Humanity," of which, as one may suppose of a living animal body, we are the members, and about a great human organism or "great human organic whole," in which we are said to live and move and have our being, like its molecules and corpuscles, and to which we owe the most unmitigated respect and duty. This sort of talk is fashionable just now in educated society.

Every day our ears are assailed by these grand words and phrases, till we are inclined to stop them with our fingers and turn away into some private garden of Epicurus, if any could be found in these days of solidarity and publicity. It is in vain, however, that you seek refuge from these terrible forms. They meet you at the very fireside. The other day I took up one of that charming series of little books, "English Men of Letters," to pass a leisure hour pleasantly, but had not read far when there confronted me this appalling formula: "Society is an organism, living and growing like other organisms, according to special laws of its own." The author blamed Gibbon for not knowing that! It was a good thing for his peace of mind that he did not. But how are we, who have the misfortune to live in this century, when these demoniac forms are stalking abroad and threatening to take possession of us, to exorcise them? Perhaps the question does not appear of much consequence. Yet to some it is becoming more and more evident that "Humanity"—the formidable apparition just defined—would sooner or later swallow up men and

women, and make of no account *individual* liberty and happiness; and that a single-block "Universe" would render impossible the very thought of freedom or spontaneity on our part.

The source of these fetiches or factitious unities lies in human nature. Their motive or emotional source, at least, is indicated in the "Novum Organum," where Bacon says: "The human understanding, from its peculiar nature, easily supposes a greater degree of order and equality in things than it really finds; and, although many things in nature be *sui generis* and most irregular, will yet invent parallels and conjugates and relatives where no such thing is." These idols of ours are, in fact, "idols of the Tribe." They arise from the desire for unity and simplicity. We unavoidably seek to accommodate the immense variety of things to our narrow comprehension. We love our ease, and so our minds tend to follow the lines of least resistance, and to make the shortest circuits round their objects. The infinite multiplicity oppresses us. We accordingly discharge multiplicity, discreteness, difference, from our view, and confine our attention to similarities and agreements and seeming continuity. But even in these we do not rest, for the current of desire that tends to unity is so strong that it carries us on to confound similarity with identity, and harmony or community with single-oneness.

Thus, by judicious neglect, we get things, as we think, within our grasp; and that was our instinctive aim from the first. Neglecting exceptions, we get laws; and we think we have eliminated what we call chance when we have simply refused to look at irregularities and give them due place and weight.

Yet it may be that there are everywhere, both in men and in nature, hidden springs and fountains of activities essentially and absolutely incalculable; that, in fact, there is such a thing as real freedom or spontaneity—real, and not merely "phenomenal." (The "phenomenal freedom" that is offered us, like a stone for bread, is only the ignorance of impotence and slavery.)

It may be very perplexing; it may even sometimes seem fit to put us to utter intellectual confusion, but we must put up with the uncertainty, for how can we establish that most desirable doctrine of the Uniformity of the Course of Nature without omniscience? Yet without an unquestionable doctrine of uniformity and thoroughgoing determinism you cannot have a grand unitary

Being, "Humanity," nor a "social organism," nor a universe perfectly continuous and all of a piece; and without such a universe or all-inclusive *objective* unity, how can we have any single and sole, embracing and intimate *subjective* unity, like the deity of pantheism or monotheism?

Besides the emotional source of these factitious unities, there appears to be a reason for them in our intellectual constitution. Whatever the "I" may really be, in "I think, I feel, I know," for us it appears a single simple something, which resists any attempt of reflection to break it up. So far as human thought and philosophy have as yet carried their disintegrating and disillusioning operations, they have not, except for a very few subtle minds, and for these only in occasional metaphysical moods, dispossessed the "me," that feels, thinks and knows, of its permanent appearance of unity. It remains, to all intents and purposes, a real unit; and to it, as to a focus, all things converge and refer themselves in order to be known. The result is, that this subjective unity of knowledge tends, when we are off our guard, to throw a false reflection or glamour of unity over its manifold objects. But, though the many strings are tied in one knot and held in one hand, they are not one string.

Again, we can only see or envisage things in what is apparently one and the same continuous Time and Space; and this also gives a spurious kind of objective unity to the several things seen or imaged together. But community is not unity; and because all things for us share alike in time and space, and perhaps have some other common property or ground, it does not follow that they may not be essentially and in themselves disparate and separate.

Leaving these very general, and perhaps very elementary, considerations, let us take a few samples of spurious unity. Take "the social organism" first—and along with it that milder and vaguer god, "Humanity."

The phrase "social organism" covers an attempt to picture society, or the assemblage of men and women, as one gigantic man or animal, which has its own laws of growth, goes its own way, and lives its own life. It is further supposed to be under rigid law, so that all it has done might be accounted for, and all it will do might be calculated on. And, if any one declares himself

unable to get beyond the notion of society as a collection of individuals, or simply men and women living together, giving and taking and interchanging offices, he is told by one sect of philosophers, who are very prominent just now, that he is resting in what is a mere mechanical conception, and must raise himself to the level of "the category of organic unity!" Granting for the moment that such a conception of society is possible, it has still to be remembered that it is no reality, and, as a concept, has no real unity corresponding to it. It is objective, conceptual, ideal only, and the subjective realities remain as real and as many as ever. The many men and women cannot be transmuted by a figure of speech into one huge single organism. But even as a metaphorical conception, is it just and helpful to speak of the social organism, that lives and grows, like other organisms, according to special laws of its own—is it founded on any essential and vital resemblance between an animal, or even a plant, and a society of men? It may very well be contended that it is not. There is at least one fatal flaw in the analogy, and that is enough to make it useless and misleading. It is this: that, whereas in an animal or real organism of any kind the parts or members are there for the whole, in society, on the other hand, the so-called whole is for the so-called parts or members severally. Men are not for society, but society is for men. It is constituted by them and for themselves—each of them counting for one. Any assertion of proper individuality or freedom on the part of any member of an animal, if persisted in, means, in the long run, disease, death, corruption; while any failure to assert individuality and freedom on the part of a member of society means, to that extent, an imperfection in the society. Aristotle appears to have felt that the analogy embodied in the modern phrase "social organism" had not even three legs to go on when he expressed a preference for the metaphor "ship of state" over that of "the body politic." In society we are sailing on a joint venture, but each for his own good. Is it possible to think of any conscious being doing anything else? What every one always and only seeks is to go on living, and living more and more happily. Would not any other tendency in a living thing be simply suicidal? Altruism, unbalanced and unmitigated, is *felo-de-se*. On the contrary, self-preservation and self-fulfilment is the law for

each and every one. The common good that we are told each of us ought to pursue is for each one of us reflected back to its focus in himself, and we cannot conceive ourselves pursuing it, except as indirectly our own highest good. It is a roundabout way of getting at our own happiness. Utilitarianism is, to use a phrase of the schools, Egoistic Eudæmonism in sublime disguise. Round both the lesser circles of egotism and altruism there can always be drawn a wider and enclosing circle of *Egoism*. When altruism has been so included, the sting of calumny is withdrawn, and there is no more occasion for the fine hypocrisy of disinterestedness and self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice; though, happily, these are impossibilities, except in pretence.

But, if we must give up this fascinating and highly scientific conception of society as an organism, the loss is not without its consolations. For it is evident that the organism-notion lends itself much less readily to free, equal, friendly, and brotherly life, than to despotisms, whether of the Bismarckian kind, or of the many-headed sort, where the greatest number for its greatest happiness claims to use us up one by one. When it has been settled that society or the state is a great animal, it will not be difficult for such members or molecules as find themselves happily situated in the head, or even it may be in the pineal gland, to justify their claim as monarchs and statesmen to rule and use the body politic, and every one of its members, according to the pleasure of their own will, and that without remedy or appeal. The Leviathan, whether of Cæsar or of the Caucus, might then eat up any one of us any day, and it is difficult to see what right the victim would have to complain if it were done scientifically and philosophically in the name of the social organism that lives and grows and devours and assimilates, like other organisms, according to special laws of its own.

The same kind of criticism may be applied to that milder-eyed idol, "Humanity." It is a grand conception, without doubt—even surpassing every other in grandeur—but let it never be forgotten that it is a mere conception. It is either an abstract noun or a noun of multitude—either an abstraction or a collection—and in no sense a real unity. It is not a reality, but an ideal. Taken as an ideal, which the real individual men and women consent to dream of and hope for—the perfect vision infinitely removed of

a harmonious, fully developed, and equipped society—as such it is good and eminently helpful; a very valuable and effective kind of dream.

But as somewhat already realized in any sense, and now here as a real unitary existent, and more real than the individuals, “Humanity” is almost, if not quite, as hurtful a delusion as the social organism.

Though it does not suggest so plainly the same grinding inexorable mechanism, it would easily lend itself to the establishment of a new kind of Papacy or hierarchy, which, in the sacred name of the god “Humanity,” would arrange our lives for us, settle what we might do and study, and what we might not, and insist on contentment with our lot and caste. But we, on the other hand, want to live our own lives and go our own ways. We want to grow freely. We would be free—“anarchical,” if you will have it so; and we desire to go on freely experimenting. We resent the prospect of being clamped together, parcelled, and pigeon-holed in this *doctrinaire* fashion. For those who feel like this, there will be some comfort in the discovery that the august and “great being” Humanity is only another idol of our own invention and erection, another tyrannical unity of our own imposition.

“The Universe,” again, is not even an idol that we have invented and set up. We only fancy we have. It is only *flatus vocis*, a name or sound which stands for nothing either real or ideal. It merely marks our *failure* to discover, or invent, or conceive. To talk of it as already found or conceived is to assume omniscience, to claim that we know all that is to be known, or at least all the kinds of things knowable, that we have summed up all the infinite many ones, and discovered them to be all alike in origin, path, and goal; that there is one principle, one order, necessity, or fate, and one end; and that so the mighty whole is really one, the “phenomenal” many are “noumenally” one, and, in fact, our single-block universe.

Now, the uniformity of nature, and of the course of nature, is a very good hypothesis for all working purposes—for life and science; but any attempt to make more of it than a maxim of prudence or habit of expectation, that sums up and gives effect to our past experience, has always issued in failure. Any attempt

to ground it on absolute certainty, or find a theoretical justification for it, begs the whole question. Here is one of these sophistical attempts from a recent number of a philosophical journal. The uniformity of nature and of the course of nature means, that "the same that has happened will happen again under the same conditions; *i. e.*, A is A, the sum of the conditions is the sum of the conditions, the universe is the universe, whether taken in *stasis* or in flow, and whatever its content, known and unknown, and at whatever point of time, past or future, we suppose the instant of attention and conceptual arrest to occur."

This is the most palpable begging of the question at issue. To find the uniformity of nature and its course, in the conclusion, the writer has put the universe in the premise. But the universe is just the totality of uniform nature; or, more precisely, it is an impossible attempt at naming concretely and in a kind of statue-like way the abstract formula, that it is put forward to prove or justify; and it presupposes the possibility of summing up the innumerable individual variants, and of afterwards resolving them into one single whole.

A double impossibility! Again, it is a resolution of difference into identity, and so, Hegelianwise, contradicts the very principle of identity and non-contradiction ("A is A") which the demonstration claims to found on.

And, further, what has been summed up is therefore finished and finite; and if the metaphysician has got something *totum teres atque rotundum*, then, just because it is what it is, and absolute, it is not infinite, and the endless multifariousness of things is left outside it. There is no way out of these impassable straits for absolutists, whether Spencerian, Hegelian, or openly and honestly materialist.

Therefore, in practice and science, men must be content to be empirical and tentative, feeling their way, and, as Professor Bain wisely and modestly says, risking the future. In theory and philosophy, again, they must be content, with Hume and Mill, to be critical and sceptical, and prepared for surprises and variations.

Variations are, as Darwin has taught us, a necessary presupposition of development; and to eliminate them, or, what is the same thing, to explain them away by referring them to the sum

of conditions, is to stay evolution and introduce stagnation in the place of movement, growth, and change.

Casualty and incalculable spontaneity appear to be of the very essence of variations; and that Darwin declined to refer them for explanation to "the sum of the conditions" or a universal principle or unknowable single-block force, is a wise reserve and suspense that has the stamp of genius on it. He left it to others of less cautious, and perhaps of less penetrative, intellect, to attribute their occurrence to an anthropomorphic creator, or to a pantheism that moves and progresses by turning itself inside out.

It is unnecessary to dwell long on the last example of factitious and idolatrous unity—namely, the deity of monotheism or pantheism—as it is obviously nothing but the universe turned outside in. If there is no single objective unity, then there can be no single and sole or supreme subjective unity. No universe, no deity—that is plain enough.

About monotheism, in particular, it may be fairly said that whenever it attempts to make itself consistent and seat itself securely, it merges in pantheism, and pantheism is simply the outside-in of the inside-out.

But if, on the other hand, the monotheist seeks to avoid this absorption of his deity in an absolutely fatalistic spirit, which is merely the inner side of its own outside the universe, both equally under necessity and absolutely determined; and if to avoid doing so he is content to rest in popular and poetical anthropomorphism, claiming for his supreme entity freedom and spontaneity, after the fashion of a man—then the opponents of monotheism are at least quite as much entitled to exercise their constructive imagination, and poetically postulate, to account for what they find in man and nature, millions on millions, beyond numbering, of free entities, springs of spontaneity, or incalculable activity.

Nor would this conception be exposed to the edge of Occam's razor. It would not be a case of entities multiplied beyond necessity, for we have the experience of separateness, difference, contrariety, and irregularity; and each of us may with equal right claim individuality, freedom, and spontaneity for himself and for his fellows with the same right that the monotheist claims it for his ideal, and with better right, for how else is his god framed

than by projection of what he finds in himself against a screen of indefinitely great space and time?

Polytheism is quite as reasonable a supposition or fancy, and more satisfactory, if you must have a theism. Indeed, the monotheisms, that have succeeded, have made shift to get along by means of some kind of subordinate polytheism.

Much more satisfactory—because you then have many unseen companions and comforters instead of one; you have stable society instead of the continual dread of absorption; you have what is evident and unmistakable poetry instead of pseudo-science; and, best of all, you have removed the bane of theism when you have made the gods many, because you have destroyed monarchy in the unseen world, which is the mainstay of absolute monarchy and all sorts of despotism in this; and so you have made it possible to realize the idea of the republic. Monotheism and monarchy are for children. If we have grown up, we do not want paternal government and tutelage, either in the seen or the unseen world. We want brothers. And no form of unbrotherliness is more heartless and mischievous, whether so intended or no, than that which throws us over, in self-excuse for indolence or indifference, upon the loving kindness of a very problematical unseen father or providence.

There is not space to enlarge on the advantages of rejecting once for all such fetiches as “social organism,” “humanity,” “universe,” and “deity.” They are endless, and very practical.

Let us get rid of all these false gods, and try, if we must have poetry, to conceive of what we find in and around us to-day as the provisional result of the endless, infinitely varied experimentation of countless free units of being.

And, whether we choose to make this imaginative synthesis or no, we shall at least be rid of the main obstacles to our advance towards the far-removed ideal harmony and confraternity—that country which all wayfarers, under various disguises and names, really seek—the commonwealth and brotherhood of men.

This, one may be permitted to hope, is that far-off event towards which we and all other beings are moving.

It may be an ideal goal that is never to be reached. A final harmony and friendly community of all beings, wherein all discords are resolved, is perhaps inconceivable.

It may be even a contradiction in terms when taken as perfect, final, and attained. But attainment does not much matter. We may even console ourselves that, if it could be accomplished, it would be stagnation.

Continual progress and approach is enough, and best. Meliorism is the only possible optimism. Lessing never said anything more permanently and impressively true than that familiar and often-quoted saying of his about Truth. And what he said about truth, one might venture to say about Good and all conceivable ends; that they are better unended and unachieved; that the flight is always better for us than the perch, on which we might fall asleep forever. In endless seeking and finding of better and better consist our life, our happiness, our highest good. Perfection would paralyze us. Finality would kill us. Attained unity and equilibrium of any kind would undo us into nothingness. The half is always more than the whole.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF IMMANUEL KANT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY A. E. KROEGER.

PART FIRST.—ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIDACTIC.

Concerning the Manner in which to cognize the Internal as well as the External of Man.

BOOK FIRST.—CONCERNING THE POWER OF COGNITION.

(Continued from January number.)

(c) CONCERNING THE DISEASES OF THE MIND.

§ 48. The foremost division is, as has been already observed, that into *crotchettiness* (*crickets*), or hypochondria, and a *perturbed mind*, or mania. The German word for the former disease—*Grillen*, crickets—is derived from the analogy in listening to the chirping sound of a cricket in the stillness of the night, which disturbs that repose of the mind necessary to induce sleep. (The English “crotchet” does exactly the same mischief.—*Translator*.) Now, the disease of the hypochondriac consists in this: that certain bodily sensations do not so much indicate a really existing